

ADDITIONAL VIEWS OF SENATOR FEINGOLD

The Administration, and particularly President Bush and Vice President Cheney, made repeated assertions about the threat posed by Saddam Hussein that were not supported by the intelligence available at the time. Those assertions overstated the nature and urgency of the threat, as described in the intelligence, ignored ongoing disagreements and uncertainty within the Intelligence Community, and, at times, outright contradicted intelligence assessments. Together, the statements sought to make the case for a war in Iraq by convincing the American people, first, that Saddam had, might have, or was on the verge of obtaining a nuclear weapon, and, second, that Saddam had a relationship with Al Qaeda and would provide Al Qaeda with weapons of mass destruction for the purpose of attacking the United States.

Even the deeply flawed October 2002 National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) did not support the claims made by the President and the Vice President regarding an Iraqi nuclear program. That NIE assessed that Iraq did not have a nuclear weapon or sufficient material to make one, and that without sufficient fissile material acquired from abroad, Iraq probably would not be able to make a weapon until 2007 or 2009. Yet the President made the following statements: “[Saddam] possesses the world’s most dangerous weapons” (March 22, 2002); “[w]e don’t know whether or not [Saddam] has a nuclear weapon” (December 31, 2002); and, of course, “[f]acing clear evidence of peril, we cannot wait for the final proof – the smoking gun – that could come in the form of a mushroom cloud” (October 7, 2002). Meanwhile, Vice President Cheney insisted that assessments related to Iraq’s nuclear program that were disputed within the Intelligence Community were known “with absolute certainty” (September 8, 2002) and through “irrefutable evidence” (September 20, 2002). And, on the eve of war, after the IAEA had reported that its inspectors had found “no evidence or plausible indication of the revival of a nuclear weapons program in Iraq, the Vice President asserted, “[w]e believe [Saddam] has, in fact, reconstituted nuclear weapons” (March 16, 2003).

Administration officials’ claims of a relationship between Iraq and al Qaeda were even more outlandish. Before the war, the Central Intelligence Agency assessed that “Saddam has viewed Islamic extremists operating inside Iraq as a threat,” that “Saddam Hussein and Usama bin Laden are far from being natural partners,” and that assessments about Iraqi links to al Qaeda rested on “a body of fragmented, conflicting reporting from sources of varying reliability.” Moreover, the Intelligence Community consistently assessed that Saddam’s use of weapons of mass destruction against the United States rested on his being “sufficiently desperate” in the face of a U.S. attack and his possible desire for a “last chance at vengeance.” Yet the President not only repeatedly suggested an operational relationship between Iraq and al Qaeda, but asserted that Saddam would provide weapons of mass destruction to al Qaeda for an unprovoked attack against the United States: “you can’t distinguish between al Qaeda and Saddam when you talk about the war on terror” (September 25, 2002); “[e]ach passing day could be the one on which the Iraqi regime gives anthrax or VX – nerve gas – or some day a nuclear weapon to a terrorist ally” (September 26, 2002); “[Saddam] is a man who, in my judgment, would like to use al Qaeda as a forward army” (October 14, 2002); “[Saddam] is a threat because he is dealing with al Qaeda... [A] true threat facing our country is that an al Qaeda-type network trained and armed by Saddam could attack American and not leave one fingerprint” (November 7, 2002); and “[t]he danger is clear: using chemical, biological or, one day, nuclear weapons obtained with the help

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of Iraq, the terrorists could fulfill their stated ambitions and kill thousands or hundreds of thousands of innocent people in our country or any other" (March 17, 2002). Yet, as the Committee report has concluded, "[s]tatements by the President and Vice President indicating that Saddam Hussein was prepared to give weapons of mass destruction to terrorist groups against the United States were contradicted by available intelligence information." Further, "[s]tatements and implications by the President and the Secretary of State suggesting that Iraq and al Qaeda had a partnership, or that Iraq had provided al Qaeda with weapons training, were not substantiated by the intelligence." Even statements that Saddam harbored al Qaeda, such as the President's assertion that he "aids and protects terrorists, including members of al Qaeda" (January 28, 2003) were not supported by the intelligence available at the time. As the CIA acknowledged, "we lack positive indications that Baghdad is complicit" in the presence of operatives associated with al Qaeda in Iraq in 2002.

These and other assertions that were contradicted by the available intelligence, including predictions of a smooth transition to a stable democracy, were intended to drive the country into a war that has cost thousands of American lives and hundreds of billions of dollars, visited untold misery on the Iraqi people, and severely damaged our national security. Administration officials used the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 to justify a war that has not only been waged in a country that had no connection to the attacks, but has seriously damaged our ability to fight al Qaeda. In that respect, the President's statement, on October 2, 2002, that "the Iraqi regime is a threat of unique urgency" was perhaps most inaccurate of all. In October 2002, and still today, the threat of unique urgency facing the United States does not come from Iraq, but from the Afghanistan/Pakistan safe haven and global capabilities of al Qaeda and its affiliates.

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